

Amendment to the Claims:

The listing of claims will replace all prior versions and listings of claims in the application:

Listing of Claims:

B1 Claim 1. (currently amended): A method of manipulating blanks in a machine for packing smokers' products wherein the blanks are stored in a magazine and are associated with collars at an assembling station prior to confinement in outer envelopes jointly with packs of smokers' products, comprising the steps of:

transporting successive collars of a series of collars from a source to the assembling station;
and

conveying successive blanks from the magazine, along a predetermined path, and on to the assembling station so that each blank reaches said station while a collar is at a standstill thereat, including positively guiding each blank ~~at least~~ along a each portion of said path.

Claim 2. (canceled).

Claim 3. (original): The method of claim 1, further comprising the steps of delivering to said station a series of successive packs, positioning each pack at said station in a manner such that at least a portion of a blank at said station is disposed between the pack and a collar, and jointly evacuating the pack, the blank and the respective collar from said station.

Claim 4. (original): The method of claim 3, further comprising the step of terminating said step of positively guiding upon completed delivery of each of said series of successive packs to said station.

Claim 5. (currently amended): The method of claim 4, wherein said terminating step includes ~~the application of~~ applying pressure to the blank at said assembling station.

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Claim 6. (currently amended): The method of claim 3, wherein said ~~evacuating~~ conveying step includes terminating said step of positively guiding upon completed delivery of each of said series of successive packs to said station.

Claim 7. (original): The method of claim 6, wherein said evacuating step further includes introducing each pack, together with a blank and a collar, into a pocket of an indexible packing conveyor.

Claim 8. (original): The method of claim 1, wherein each of the blanks is a coupon.

Claim 9. (original): The method of claim 1, wherein each of said conveying steps includes conveying a blank to a position beneath the collar at said station.

Claim 10. (original): The method of claim 1, wherein said guiding step includes simultaneously guiding several portions of a blank in said portion of said path.

Claim 11. (withdrawn): Apparatus for manipulating blanks in a machine for packing smokers' products wherein the blanks are stored in a magazine and are associated with collars at an assembling station prior to confinement in an outer envelope jointly with packs of smokers' products, comprising:

means for transporting successive collars of a series of collars from a source of collars to the assembling station;

means for temporarily maintaining each collar at said station in a predetermined position;

means for conveying a succession of blanks from the magazine, along a predetermined path, and on to said station so that each blank reaches said station while a collar is at a standstill thereat in said predetermined position thereof; and

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guide means for positively guiding each blank at least along a portion of said path.

Claim 12. (withdrawn): The apparatus of claim 11, wherein a collar dwelling at said station in said predetermined position thereof is located at least in part at a level above a blank at said station.

Claim 13. (withdrawn): The apparatus of claim 12, wherein said means for temporarily maintaining includes a device having at least one pocket located beneath the blank at said station, said guide means being arranged to releasably hold a blank at said station against unintentional entry into said pocket.

Claim 14. (withdrawn): The apparatus of claim 13, further comprising means for moving a blank at said station from said guide means into said at least one pocket.

Claim 15. (withdrawn): The apparatus of claim 14, further comprising means for delivering packs into the at least one pocket at said station.

Claim 16. (withdrawn): The apparatus of claim 15, wherein said moving means is arranged to push a blank at said station from said guide means toward the pack in said at least one pocket.

Claim 17. (withdrawn): The apparatus of claim 1, wherein said guide means is spaced apart from the collar at said station.

Claim 18. (withdrawn): The apparatus of claim 11, wherein said conveying means includes at least one wheel and at least one suction head on said at least one wheel.

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Reply to Office Action of August 1, 2003

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Claim 19. (withdrawn): The apparatus of claim 18, further comprising means for separating blanks from said at least one suction head not later than at said station.

Claim 20. (withdrawn): The apparatus of claim 11, wherein the blanks include coupons.

Claim 21. (withdrawn and currently amended): An apparatus for manipulating blanks in a machine for packing smokers' products wherein the blanks are stored in a magazine and are associated with collars at an assembling station prior to confinement in outer envelopes jointly with packs of smokers' products, comprising:

means for transporting successive collars of a series of collars from a source to the assembling station; and

means for conveying successive blanks from the magazine, along a predetermined path, and on to the assembling station so that each blank reaches said station while a collar is at a standstill thereat, including positively guiding each blank ~~at least~~ along a each portion of said path.
